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VAN ZUYLEN BATIK, PEKALONGAN, CENTRAL JAVA (1890–1946)

M. J. DE RAADT-APELL

Fine Javanese batiks from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century sometimes bear the signature "E. v. Zuylen" (Fig. 1), and may be stamped on the reverse as well, "Batikkerij Mevr. E. van Zuylen, Pekalongan," meaning "Batik-Compound Mrs. E. van Zuylen, Pekalongan" (Fig. 2). Over a period of more than fifty years, this signature came to be a mark of quality batik coming from Pekalongan, a city on the north coast of Central Java in what was then called the Dutch East Indies, known today as the Republic of Indonesia.

From 1890 to 1946 Eliza van Zuylen (Fig. 3) and her family operated what became the largest batik compound in Pekalongan. Compound here refers to a fenced or walled enclosure of residences and commercial buildings. Pekalongan was among the well-known batik centers on the north coast of Java, others being Semarang, noted for red batiks; Cirebon and Lasem, showing very strong Chinese influence, and Surabaya.¹ After 1850 batik industries emerged under the management of Indische women;² in addition to Eliza van Zuylen, there were Mrs. Metzelaar, Jans, Simonet, and several others. Van Zuylen batiks do survive, but are seldom available for purchase in Java today.³

THE VAN ZUYLEN BATIK BUSINESS

Eliza van Zuylen was born Eliza Niessen in 1863 in Batavia, as Jakarta was called until 1949. Her older sister, Christina (Tina), married Jan van Zuylen of Pekalongan and settled there. Eliza married Jan's younger brother,

Alphons, and they settled in Batavia. When they had two children, the family moved to Pekalongan.

When Tina's husband died, leaving her with ten children, she took in lodgers to make ends meet. She managed a florist's shop as well, and finally a small batik industry. Very soon Eliza began to take great interest in the batik process and went every day to assist her sister at the batik business, which produced tablecloths, runners, handkerchiefs, sarong, and dresses. With the apparent motive of keeping her closer to home, her husband Alphons proposed that she herself start a business. In 1890 she began what was to become a close combination of workshop and family and, finally, the largest compound in Pekalongan, famed far beyond the Indonesian archipelago.

At that time, the batik industry was one of the main sources of income for Pekalongan, subject to the ups and downs of the general economy. The Javanese practiced the art in small compounds, but there were also larger establishments under Javanese, Chinese, Arab, Indian, and Dutch management, always in family compounds with Javanese skilled labor. In the *Kandang-ajam* ("henhouse") quarter, for example, where both Javanese and Europeans lived, several European-run industries existed.

Eliza van Zuylen's batik business began in a



Fig. 1 Signature of Eliza van Zuylen.



Fig. 2 Van Zuylen compound stamp. Detail of Figure 6.



Fig. 3 Eliza van Zuylen, age 48, photographed by J. F. Charls of Semarang.

compound on Boegisan, the street where her family lived. Alphons provided the capital to buy materials and to engage three skilled Javanese female workers. The first products were sarong, *kain*, and tablecloths. Eliza showed her work to the Arabs who sold materials to her. They were immediately interested and bought her products for trading. The business flourished and it was not long before she had Chinese customers also, who ordered special designs and colors and became her largest group of customers. Beautiful specimens showing these Chinese influences are fortunately still in existence. Subsequently European and Indische women began to buy from Eliza as well.

In addition to the steady customers coming to Pekalongan, Mrs. van Zuylen also sent parcels of batiks on request to cities elsewhere on Java, to Sumatra, and to Singapore on a sale or return basis. The entire trade from importers to retailers was done purely on trust.⁴

Later, orders were even received from America for curtains and fanlight screens, which exploited the recently discovered beauty of back-lighted batik. The screens were worked in red and blue with figures of *wajang kulit*, the flat leather shadow puppets of the Javanese theater.

As the amount of work continued to increase, requiring more labor, the accommodations became too small. Therefore, in 1904 the family moved to a larger house and pre-

mises on the Heerenstraat (Gentlemen's Road), which faced on the *aloon-aloon* (central square or green) and behind which flowed the Pekalongan River.

Large batik industries use a lot of water, both to rinse out the many chemicals used to prepare the raw cotton cloth, and, once the cloth has been dyed, to remove excess dye. Most compounds did this by rinsing the cloth in the river. However, Eliza wanted the water to be as pure as possible and so had wells sunk in the compound which were surrounded by concrete flooring and one-meter-high walls; the entire system ultimately drained into the river.

As more and more orders were received, and the family kept growing through the years, the house had to be enlarged. Marble floors were installed and next to the open rear verandah was the batik room, where finished batiks were stored and business affairs were conducted. The out-buildings contained, as was customary in the Dutch East Indies, the *gudang* (store room), bathroom, and servants' quarters. To these were added three rooms: one for the preparation of fresh cloth with oil and lye, one for red dye, and one for indigo. The indigo room was bounded on three sides by the garden to reduce general awareness of the odor which characterizes that vegetable dye. In the garden itself three sheds were erected: one for yellow dye and two for batik women. The *bilik* (bamboo basketwork) construction allowed the wind to blow gently through the walls, creating a cool work environment. Even with these additional structures, it was sometimes so busy that the stables and henhouse had to be pressed into service.

In addition, some cabins were built for women who stayed overnight on the premises to continue working in the evening. Kerosene lamps, used in the beginning, were later replaced by gaslight, which was a great improvement. Some of these women stayed only occasionally; others lodged in these cabins more or less permanently. Some, on the other hand, did not come even every day, perhaps because it was too far, or they worked only partially for Eliza and had their own small business, or they preferred to work in their own familiar surroundings. Experienced women who could work without supervision went into the smaller shed. Those who needed some guidance worked in the larger one. There Eliza presided behind a desk, where she could exercise control. If necessary, she personally pencilled-in corrections or improvements in the design.

All her batik women were skilled workers

who would only be engaged after a test of ability. They were much sought after, therefore, by competing firms and to discourage them from joining another firm, they were given an advance of 25 guilders on being hired, which they had to repay on giving notice. All payments were made on a piece-work basis (*borongan*). Eliza paid the wages from her desk twice a week, and every five weeks, on *Kemis-Wage*, the day preceding the holiday *Jumahat Kliwon*, also paid small advances of one-half to one guilder. By the time World War II reached the Dutch East Indies in December 1941, between 80 and 100 women were employed at the compound, and in the Javanese quarter of town an additional score worked for Eliza.

Eliza was an intelligent organizer, whose strict character was balanced by a warm heart. Many of the women had to come on foot from adjacent villages. When they arrived on time they got a free breakfast to encourage punctuality. They bought their own lunch from one of several vendors who came on the premises with *tanggungan* (yokes with portable hot food). In the wet season every woman got a *pajung* (oiled paper umbrella) and when it was chilly, hot *wedang jahé* (a Japanese ginger beverage) was prepared for them. Medical care, rendered by a Javanese physician, was paid for by Eliza, a rare occurrence in those days. Sometimes she and the doctor could be seen proceeding over the narrow dikes between the rice fields on their way to visit a patient in a neighboring village.

Family life received much attention. Events such as birthdays or promotions at school were celebrated by all the batik workers and domestic servants. Any girl who wanted to learn batik was welcome; she could watch skilled batik women and practice as much as she wanted. Children began to train with a *canting* (a waxing tool) filled with water before they were allowed to try hot wax. Relatives gave assistance in conceiving designs, constructing compositions, and even dispensing meals to workers. When the children married, grandchildren were welcome also. Holidays were often spent by all at Eliza's home and at Christmas the whole family assembled. When an exceptional event occurred at a worker's home, like a birth, marriage, or death, Eliza visited the family, often accompanied by one or more of her daughters. Eliza herself gave birth to twelve children, only eight of whom outlived her. Her husband died in 1918.



Fig. 4 Typical Indische sarong and *kabaja*, worn by Indonesian-Chinese woman, ca. 1890. Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, Amsterdam, Album 356/39.

GARMENTS AND DESIGNS

While working, Eliza would wear an informal sarong, simpler and less costly than the more elaborate one she wore outside work hours, with a *kabaja*,⁵ a loosely fitted, long-sleeved white blouse edged with lace (Fig. 4). At that time it was customary to dress for comfort and

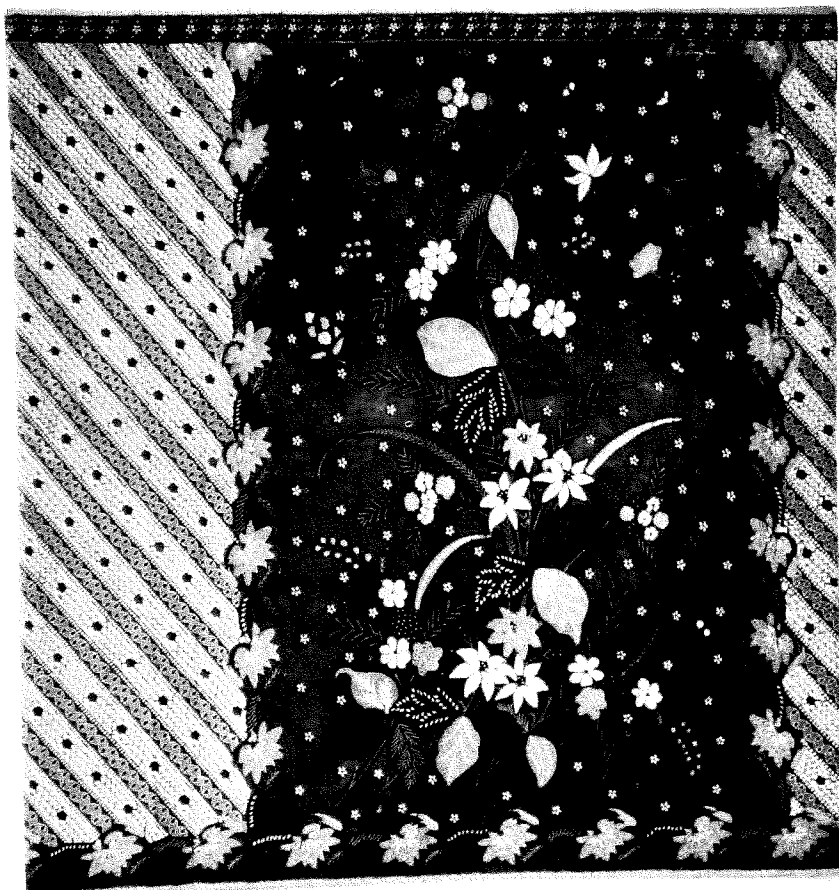


Fig. 5 a Sarong, ca. 1900, combining traditional patterns from Jogjakarta in the *badan* and European designs in the *kepala* and borders. The badan features a *garis miring* (slanting lines) motif, consisting of alternating darker and paler strips, always separated by a string of beads or pearls. The lighter-colored bands contain several undulating tendrils with small leaves, the central band being periodically interrupted by larger flowers. This

pattern is called *tempé*, soybean cake, which it resembles here if viewed in cross section. The darker strips show a motif that probably represents an extremely stylized *parang rusak*. The *kepala* is adorned with bouquets of madonna lilies and other flowers. The bright blue and pinkish-brown colors are characteristic of the north coast. Signature. Private collection.



b Detail. The upper border with tendrils, leaves, and flowers in a rigid geometric composition is typical of the period.

coolness at home in sarong and kabaja, rather than according to European fashion, in dresses with narrow, long sleeves and often with high collars.⁶ When Eliza left the house or received guests she donned a dress (Fig. 3).

A sarong is a tubular garment, about 107

cm. long and 220 cm. in circumference (Figs. 5–11, 17–19). The *kepala* or head, a vertical area approximately 70 cm. wide, is almost always different in design and coloring from the main part, called the *badan* or body. The top is edged with a narrow decorated border and the bottom with a wider border (Figs. 6, 7) called the *boog* (Dutch for “arch” or “bow”). The latter is bounded on its top edge by a lobed or undulating line. In addition both selvages have a one-cm.-wide border with small vertical lines that suggest a fringe (Fig. 1, top). The garment is wrapped around the lower part of the body like a skirt, with the *kepala* placed in front, in back, or on one side. As a rule, in the early twentieth century, the *kepala* was worn in front by Indische and Chinese women.

A *kain panjang* (“long cloth”) is about 107 cm. wide and 250 cm. long; like a sarong, it is decorated over the entire surface (Figs. 12–16). On north coast kain, however, at one of



Fig. 6 Typical Indische wedding sarong, ca. 1900, in Jugendstil, with "the lotus and the swan," a popular motif at the time, pictured repeatedly in the *badan*. The background of the *badan* has a pattern of diagonally arranged green dots, an unusual addition to this design. In the

kepala vertical rows of lilies of the valley appear with geometric figures in *nitik* motif, imitating a woven design. Stamp, no signature. Collection of Mrs. C.E.H. de Rijck van der Gracht née Moorman, The Hague.



Fig. 7 Sarong, ca. 1900, in cream and red. In the central part of the *kepala* are clusters of flowers that form a line from bottom left to top right, a favorite arrangement at

that time. The *boog* consists of triangles. Stamp, signature. Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, No. 1585-22.



Fig. 8 a Sarong, ca. 1900, mostly white and blue, with some green. It was used not only by Indische brides when retiring after their wedding but also often as mourning dress by the Chinese. The undecorated white flowers in

the two shorter edges there is generally an ornamented border about 5 cm. wide. The cloth is traditionally worn as a wraparound skirt with the front end usually arranged in

b Detail of kepala.



the *kepala* are typical of Van Zuylen batiks. In the white *badan* they are repeated in blue, and are decorated and executed in different techniques. Signature. Veldhuisen collection, Rotterdam.

five accordion pleats (*wiron*) that swing open rhythmically as the wearer walks.

One variety of kain is the *pagi-soré* (Figs. 15, 16), in which the cloth is divided into two halves by an oblique boundary. The two parts have top and bottom reversed and are different in design and color, enabling the wearer to use it for different occasions, such as morning (*pagi*) and evening (*soré*).

The kain is a more formal garment than the sarong; both are worn by men and women. Generally kain and sarong with patterns intended for women were produced at Van Zuylen's. On request courtiers or dignitaries could have batiks with masculine designs. If they desired a motif that was not very well-known, a sample was produced. In Eastern Java the sarong is worn more frequently by men than in the central part, but always informally. They consider it discourteous to appear before a superior in a sarong.

Javanese women wear the sarong or kain on the naked body; European and Indische women wore it over underwear; all wore the kabaja. Indonesian and Chinese young girls also wore sarong and kabaja, and European girls were sometimes dressed this way for fun or to be photographed. Sarong made for girls were as a rule of the less expensive *cap* type batik, in which the wax is applied with a cap (stamp) instead of with a canting. These batiks were available at the *pasars* (Indonesian markets). Once in a while sarong for children were

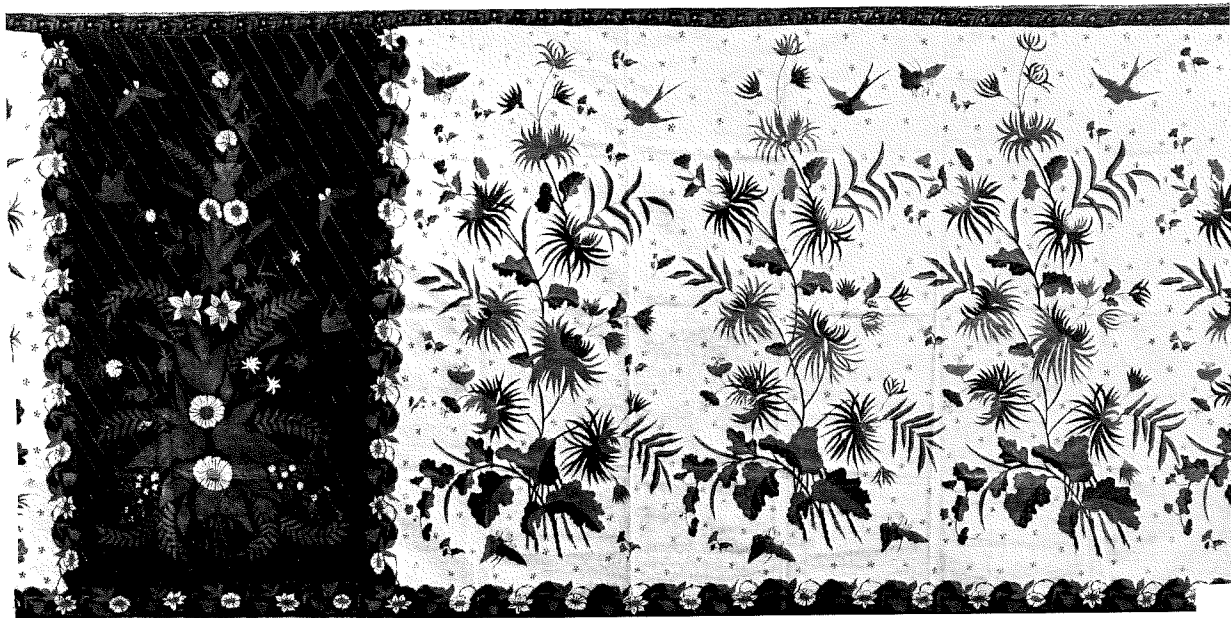


Fig. 9 Sarong, ca. 1910, in various shades of chocolate brown. The bouquet in the *kepala* is completely different from those in the *badan*, the latter being more freely

drawn and showing Chinese influences. Signature. Veldhuisen collection, Rotterdam.

made at Van Zuylen's, but the cap method was never practiced there.

The kain or sarong was secured at the waist by an *udit*, a long, narrow band of colored cotton. Attached to this was a decorated silver hook with a bunch of keys. If the sarong was too short for the taller Western women, it was lengthened at the upper border by adding a matching piece of cotton, over which the *udit* was wrapped. Chinese women wore a silver or golden belt over the *udit*. No sewing was done at the Van Zuylen compound; kain were not hemmed and even sarong, normally sewn into a tube, were delivered to the buyer without the ends sewn together.

Javanese batik has been subject to many foreign influences, the earliest being Indian. This resist technique was first recorded for Java by a Westerner as late as 1817, by Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles,⁷ the British Lieutenant Governor of Java from 1811 to 1816. Batiks were used at the palaces of the Central Javanese sovereigns not only as ceremonial dress but as everyday wear. These monarchs determined which traditional patterns, in colors of black, blue, brown, and creamy white, were reserved for the *bangsawan* (nobility and aristocracy) and which were allocated to the common people. This practice characterizes the *Vorstenlanden*, the principalities of south Central Java. Rouffaer⁸ contrasts the style of that region with that of the north coastal regions, where foreign influences, particularly Chinese, continued to be active, resulting in much more liberal designs and more lively

colors (Figs. 8, 9). The standard work on the art of batik, *De Batikkunst*, is the third of five volumes on indigenous artistic handicrafts of the Dutch East Indies,⁹ written by J.E. Jasper and Mas Pirngadie, who were friends of the Van Zuylen. Jasper was a government official in Pekalongan who finally became governor of Jogjakarta. Pirngadie, an artist well known for his paintings, drawings, and etchings, was associated with the Royal Batavian Society of Art and Science and other institutions.

Javanese women, including those working in the coastal batik compounds, would wear only traditional batiks. At Van Zuylen's, these were generally made to order and were the most difficult to execute, making them more expensive. They were usually produced on the premises, under Eliza's personal control, by experienced women who were paid more for their greater skill.

The Susuhunan (sovereign) of Surakarta (Solo) was a very high-ranking client who visited the compound several times. Doing the appropriate honors required much attention, often on only a few hours notice. Crowds would fill the streets at the news of the anticipated arrival of the sovereign and his retinue of consorts and wives, each of whom was allowed to select a kain, but only from the traditional range.

Besides these traditional batiks, pieces with a mixture of European and traditional designs were made: Eliza would change traditional patterns by stylizing them (Figs. 14, 20, 21) or by combining them with other designs (Figs.

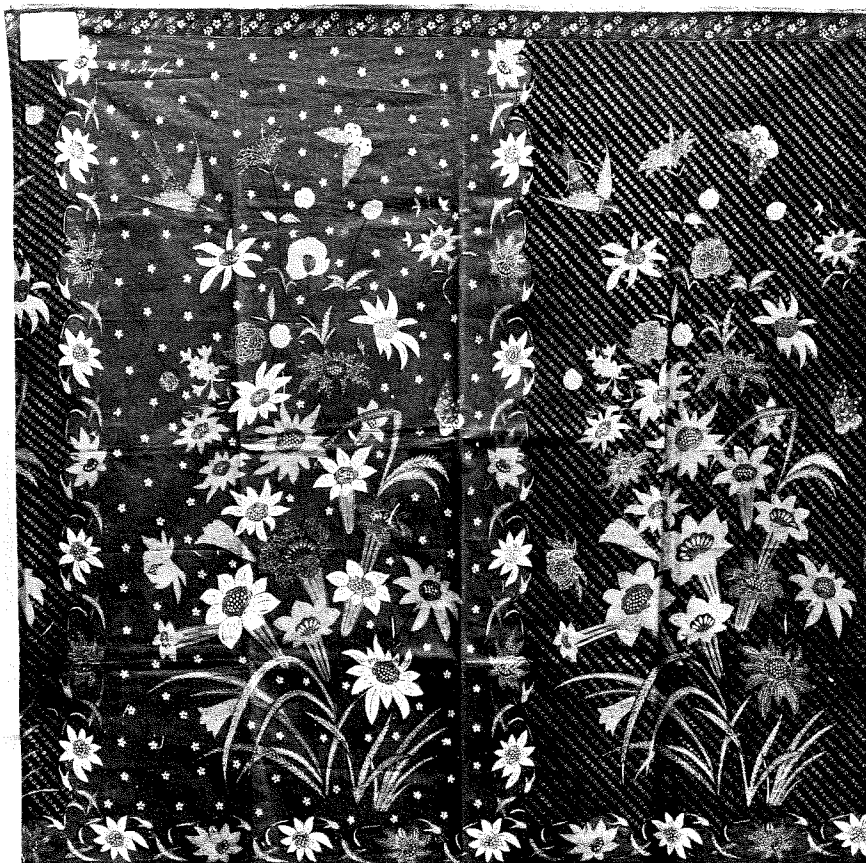


Fig. 10 Sarong, 1935–1937, with bouquets of madonna lilies. The *kepala* has a blue background with red and white lilies. The *badan* has a peculiar reddish-brown background with a *garis miring* pattern, and the lilies are blue and red. The style of the design would suggest a date of

ca. 1920, but the piece must in fact date to no earlier than 1935, because synthetic dyes were used, and no later than 1937, because it has a signature but no stamp. Veldhuisen collection, Rotterdam.

5-7, 10, 12, 20). For instance, in one early Van Zuylen sarong, ca. 1900 (Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, No. 3424-5; not illustrated here), the straight lines that traditionally separate patterns in the *badan* are replaced by rows of stems and elongated leaves, decreasing the rigid, geometric effect of the composition. *De Batikkunst* by Jasper and Pirngadie¹⁰ was a reliable source for traditional designs like *semen*, a once-royal pattern that depicts natural objects—flowers, leaves, birds, animals, and mountains—or man-made objects such as houses against a background of curling tendrils. Eliza would regroup these in new, original compositions (Fig. 13). Or she might put down floral motifs and then create a background with a *parang* (sword) pattern, which had been reserved originally for sovereigns, nobility, and their families.¹¹

In the past, an impudent Javanese who dared to violate the *adat* (customary law) by wearing a pattern to which he was not entitled (*larangan* in Javanese) could expect to be sentenced to corporal punishment, especially in the Vorstenlanden.¹² As late as this century,

such a prohibition would probably have kept even common Javanese people from buying a nontraditional batik.¹³ By World War II this view was no longer generally held, except possibly in the palaces in the Vorstenlanden. When the Sultan of Langkat, in North Sumatra, brought his suite of men so that each could select a batik for his wife, they preferred the lively colored “Pekalongans.”

It was not uncommon for a Chinese bride to have a trousseau, which might contain Van Zuylen batiks. For these, *parang* designs were often used. The rows of stylized *parangs* always run diagonally from bottom left to top right. This pattern consists of slanting broad bands of graceful, curled motifs alternating with narrower bands in another color decorated with diamond shapes. In the more common variety, *parang rusak* (broken), the *parang* motifs originate from both edges of the band, so that two rows point in opposite directions. In the *parang menang* (conquering) type, the motifs in one band all point in the same direction (Fig. 14). The latter pattern was interpreted by the Chinese as a symbol of



Fig. 11 Sarong, ca. 1910, with bouquets of chrysanthemums, swallows, and butterflies. Signature. Veldhuisen collection, Rotterdam. **a** The *kepala*, with blue background.

victory. To control her husband, the bride often wore a kain of this type, hidden under the wedding dress. Otherwise, the bride's mother donned such a kain, but exposed the cloth to view.

One special category of sarong (*kelengan*) was made only in blue and white, perhaps with green added. These sarong were worn by Indische brides when retiring after the wedding. Often they were made on request with a special design such as "the lotus (Indonesian *taraté*) and the swan" (Fig. 6). The *kepala* might feature forget-me-nots or lilies of the valley (Fig. 6), which are not native to Indonesia.

This same blue and white color combination was used by the Chinese in a mourning sarong when the deceased was a close relative; otherwise green and yellow might be added. In the Indische community there were no special conventions of color or design to relate a sarong to a specific event, but if there was a death in the family Eliza always wore a blue and white sarong for several months, possibly influenced by the Chinese custom.



b The *badan*, with red background.

Around 1900 a fashion developed to use batik to imitate woven patterns or other textile techniques (Fig. 6, 17–19). Among those imitated were *lurik*, a striped or checkered fabric woven from different color yarns, and *ikat*, the technique of resist-dyeing patterns in the yarns before weaving. There was also *nitik*, in which batik is used to produce the appearance of certain woven patterns.

Finally, there were completely nontraditional, modern batiks, conceived by the European managers from Dutch postcards, wall-paper designs, printed cottons, pictures from poetry albums, or other sources, particularly those that featured floral and animal motifs. Around the turn of the century it became fashionable to order special designs from fairy tales, such as Cinderella or Snow White. In sarong such designs were depicted either as a single large scene filling the badan or as a small scene repeated; in kain the latter is customary. In one surviving Van Zuylen sarong (private collection), ca. 1895, Little Red Riding Hood appears in the badan several times, as a bouquet would, on an allover nitik pattern. A kain also featuring Little Red Riding Hood is in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (TR 2173.2). Both pieces are signed.

Once Eliza had selected the desired flowers, birds, butterflies, and background designs, they were copied and elaborated on rice paper. These drawings were executed by a *tukang sungging*, an artist who could also draw Javanese subjects, especially wajang images, or carve them in wood. He knew many Javanese myths and legends, with which he entertained the children while he worked.

Completed pictures of flowers were cut out and arranged in a bouquet by various artistic relatives, especially Eliza's daughters Lily (1898–1977), later Mrs. Nijman, and Clementine (1890–1979), later Mrs. Soeters. Eliza's favorite flowers, madonna lilies, are present in many of her cloths (Fig. 10).

Sometimes strange combinations are found, like foxgloves on anemone-like stems, butterflies alongside leafless trees, or oriental basketwork as background for Little Red Riding Hood. Such incongruities might be the result of an Eastern designer's insufficient knowledge of or indifference to Dutch conditions. Or perhaps a customer's personal preference might lead to changes of detail in the borders of sarong, in the flanking borders of the kepala, and in the background, where slanting lines of small diamonds might be added. The inelegant butterfly native to Java, having small

wings and a thick abdomen, was replaced by the European kind with large, beautifully elaborated wings and a slender body. After 1930, under Chinese influence, these butterflies became still larger and more intensely decorated.

On Van Zuylen batiks the preference for flowers with colored edges and plain white petals (*isen*) is always striking. At first the flowers were big and bold; later smaller ones in more refined patterns, such as lilies of the valley or hyacinths arranged in small bouquets, are found. The vogue for "Jugendstil," or art nouveau, motifs also found its place in Van Zuylen batiks (Fig. 6, 12, 20, 21) as late as 1920. The German name for this decorative style, which features swaying, curving lines and floral and leaf motifs, usually quite asymmetrical, derived from the magazine *Jugend* (youth).¹⁴

On one occasion a compound at Kudus, also in Central Java, acquired a Van Zuylen design by bribery and turned this motif out before Van Zuylen had used it. The discovery of the misdemeanor led to a law suit that cost the Kudus compound heavily.

THE BATIK PROCESS

The Van Zuylen compound used a top quality bleached *primissima* cambric known as *Tjap Sen*. This fabric was imported from Twente, a textile district in the Eastern Netherlands, in bolts ± 107 cm. wide by 16 m. long. From a single bolt one kain (± 107 cm. \times 250 cm.) and six sarong (± 107 cm. \times 220 cm.) could be made. Narrower bolts existed as well, but generally for the highest grade, the widest cloth was selected. The cotton was held up to the light to detect weaving imperfections. If too many were grouped together, the flawed area was taken out to use for table centers, runners, or other small cloths (Figs. 20, 21). After measuring for kain and sarong with a rod, two men, Djoe and Wardjan, tore the cloth; it was never cut.

The cloth was prepared by boiling and rinsing to remove the sizing, then treated with oil and lye (Javanese *ngetelli*) twice daily for thirty days, allowing the fabric to dry between immersions, which made the cloth cream-colored. To make the cloth smooth, it was next starched and beaten with wooden mallets on a wooden block, both preferably from the jackfruit tree (*Artocarpus integra* Merr.), which had the right hardness.

Eliza employed many batik women with varying degrees of skill, each of whom was given a measured and prepared piece of cloth,



Fig. 12 This *kain*, ca. 1900, is a magnificent example of a mixture of traditional Javanese and European motifs. The traditional *merak ngigel* (peacock with spread tail) and double *lar* (wing) designs have been westernized, somewhat in the Jugendstil manner, as can be seen in the birds' tails and in the tendrils on the inner edges of the *lar* motifs. The form and pattern of the leaves between the other images is also European in style; the entire piece is strongly reminiscent of a Gobelin tapestry. The blue background is densely decorated with white dots; the peacocks are brown, cream, and blue, and the leaves are white or dark brown and black. Signature. Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, No. 4100-1.

stamped "Batikkerij Mevr. E. van Zuylen, Pek-alongan" in violet ink (Fig. 2). This stamp generally became invisible after immersion in the dyes.

The fabric was then fastened to the paper pattern using pins or even a few grains of cooked rice, and the design was retraced in pencil on the cotton. The cloth was then ready for the application of wax. For the traditional motifs only the main lines were pencilled in, following a model, and the rest was drawn directly in wax if a skilled, experienced woman was at work. At Van Zuylen's, *batik tulis*, the art of writing with wax, was practiced exclusively. Molten wax was applied with a *canting*, a tool with a small, spouted metal cup and a reed or bamboo handle. In Java it is customary for women to do *canting* work. *Caps*, metal stamps for applying wax, are handled by men,



Fig. 13 This *kain*, ca. 1936, is an experiment in which traditional *semen* designs are regrouped into a pleasing whole with a European touch. The detail decoration of the figures differs from the traditional manner, as do the colors. Instead of the traditional cream, blue, brown, and black, the use of synthetic dyes here gives bright blue-green, brown, and pinkish-orange. The cream background is strewn with brown *ukels*. Signature. Private collection.

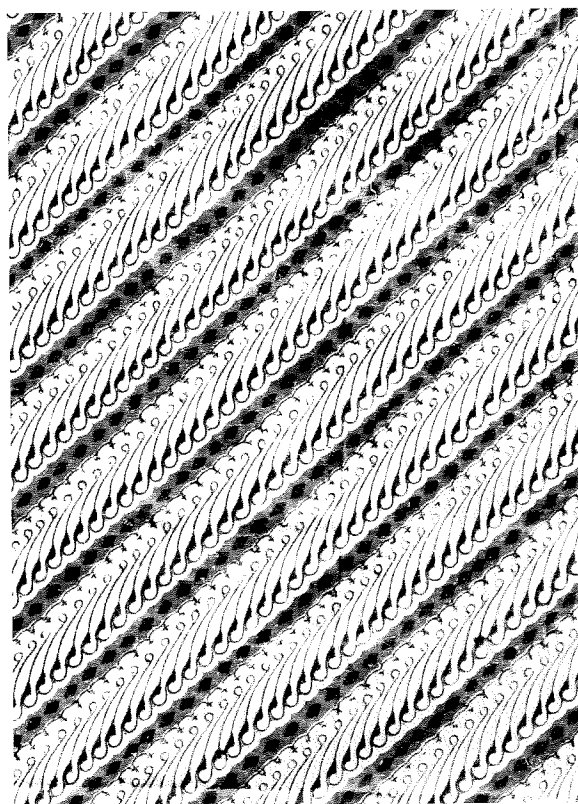


Fig. 14 *Kain*, ca. 1900, with traditional *parang menang* motif in cream, brown, and black. The width of one *parang* plane here is 3.7 cm.; eighteen bands can be counted from selvedge to selvedge. Such an intricate design might take a skilled batik woman nine months to execute. Signature. Collection of Mrs. L. Howes-van Zuylen, Pittsford, N.Y.

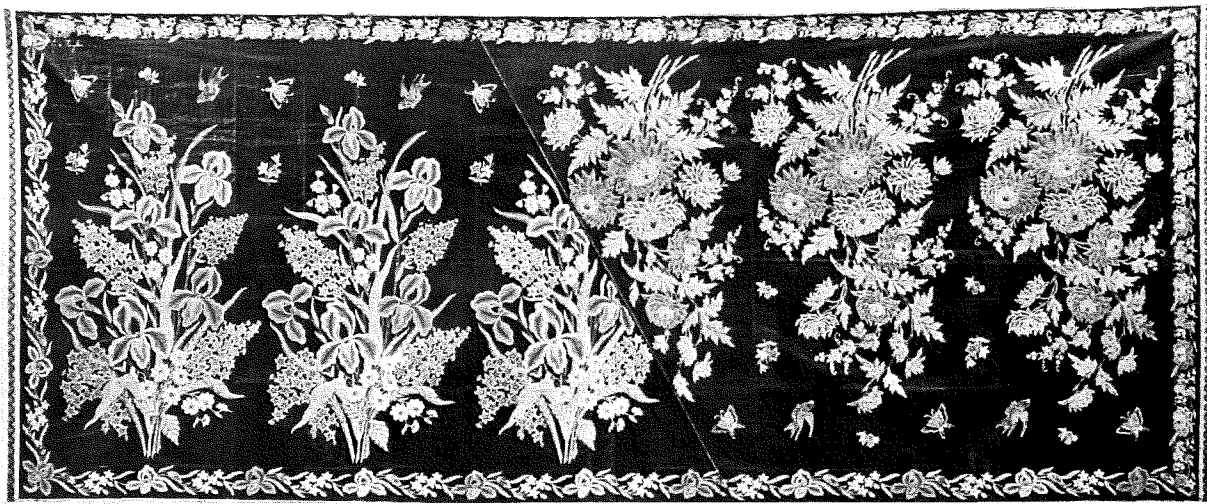


Fig. 15 *Pagi-soré kain*, 1935–1937. The left half has a violet background with bouquets of irises, hyacinths, and undecorated white daisies. The right half has bouquets of pink chrysanthemums against a green background.

The border on one long edge (selvedge) shows irises and hyacinths, the other roses. Signature, synthetic dyes. Collection of Mrs. A. M. Soeters, Vermetten. Fotostudio Cees Bolier, The Hague.

but were never used at Van Zuylen's.

The Javanese word for the first waxing is *ngrèngrèng*. When this step was finished, the work was examined by Eliza, who pencilled in her signature, which was retraced in wax, by the same batik woman, before the cloth was dyed. Thus it retains the color of the cloth after initial preparation (Fig. 1). The signature was occasionally forgotten, especially if the piece was waxed outside the premises. Van Zuylen batiks owned by Eliza's relatives are sometimes fine quality but unsigned; tablecloths and centers, intended as gifts and not for trade, are never signed.

The custom of signing a batik was introduced by European managers, and adopted by the Chinese. The Javanese never did this, out of modesty and because traditional works were customarily anonymous. After World War II, Javanese compounds, often under Muslim management, also adopted the practice. Today a signature may prove of great value in the dating of a batik.¹⁵ However, at times it may be very difficult, if not impossible, to determine the exact time of production, for certain designs fashionable during one period were revived later, sometimes on request.¹⁶

Once waxed on one side, the cloth was put aside until the pattern could be retraced in wax on the reverse (*tèrussi* or *nèrussi*). This work was done by less experienced and less highly paid women, except for the intricate, traditional designs, which were executed on both sides by the most experienced women,¹⁷ sometimes taking as long as nine months.

When the batik women who did not work at the compound had finished the waxing process they brought their work to Eliza. To

prevent the wax layer from cracking, the cloth was carefully rolled up in the bark of a banana tree trunk and transported thus encased. Today the fine hairlines of dye arising from cracked wax are quite desirable but in those days cracks were considered an imperfection to be avoided.

Batiks on silk were sometimes ordered. The Chinese silk used was first prepared in the same way as cotton. For the resist wax and resin were mixed in a special ratio, using only the *mata kucing* (cat's eye) variety of resin. The *damar* or *Hopea* (Malay *meranti*) tree is one of several members of the Dipterocarpaceae family that yield this gum. Eliza did not much care for these orders, because the deviation from routine caused considerable delay.

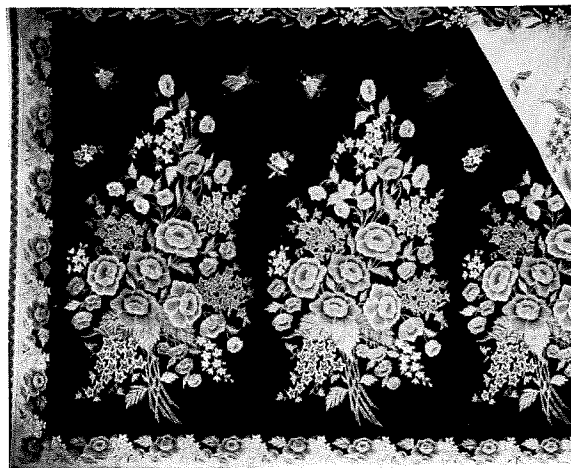
The original procedure in the Vorstenlanden for executing traditional batik designs is intricate. After the first waxing, the creamy-white cloth is dyed with indigo. When this process is finished and the cloth is dry, new patterns are scratched in the wax with a small, dull knife, and fresh designs are done in wax on the blue surface. If a brown dye is applied next, the places where the wax was removed become brown, the blue covered with wax will remain blue, but the unshielded blue will turn black. Four colors result: cream, blue, brown, and black.¹⁸

Eliza used another method. After waxing and dyeing with indigo, all wax was removed by boiling. What was to remain cream or blue was covered with a new coating of wax, then dyed in the brown bath. The same colors resulted as in the preceding method, but the edges of the design were much sharper and more distinct, and it was a great time-saver.



Fig. 16 *Pagi-soré kain*, 1937–1940. Similar to the piece in Figure 14, but more European in style. Signature, numbered 168. Veldhuisen collection, Rotterdam.

a The left half shows irises, hyacinths, and daisies on a cream background, as do two borders.



b The right half and the other two borders feature bouquets of roses and the small bunches of little white flowers typical of Van Zuylen designs, on a blue background.

On the island of Madura, in other cities on the north coast of Java, and in India this method was also used.¹⁹

Vegetable dyes were prepared in the traditional manner. According to Rouffaer,²⁰ the use of these dyes had been perfected in European compounds by systematizing the procedures.

At Van Zuylen's, vegetable yellow was made from *tegerang* (*Cudrania Javanensis* Trec.) with the bark of *jirek* (*Symplocos fasciculata* Zoll.) as a mordant. *Kunir* (*Curcuma domestica*), another well-known vegetable yellow, was never used.

In the shed for yellow dye stood a legged, wooden trough with low sides, large enough to hold a *kain panjang*. The trough slanted toward one short end, where an opening was situated over a pail containing the fluid dye. The dye was taken out of this container in a small can, poured on the cloth, and spread with a soft brush. The fabric was then reversed, the other side was treated, and, when finished, was hung across a bamboo pole over the trough so that excess dye could run back into the pail as the cloth dripped dry. This process was repeated three or four times.

For red, *mengkudu* was used, obtained from the bark and roots of the *Morinda citrifolia* plant. This dye has more body and is pulpier than the yellow; it can be kneaded, rubbed, and patted into the cloth by hand, again on both sides. Excess red dye was recovered in the same manner as the yellow, and the process was also repeated three or four times.

Work continued on into the evening if many rush orders had to be filled. The dyeing was performed by men, called *tukang celep* (artisans who immerse in fluid, i.e., dye), who got spe-

cial clothing from the establishment. If necessary Eliza and her daughters helped with the yellow and red dyeing. All dyeing was carried out on the premises, with the exception of soda brown and its mixtures. These were done in the *kampung*, or Javanese quarter of town, along traditional lines. Marjati, a batik woman with her own business who also worked for other compounds, including Eliza's, produced a beautiful, much sought-after, chocolate brown color. Most probably her dye was not made with soda but was produced by combining *mengkudu* with an iron derivative.²¹ She kept this formula strictly secret, as Indische women did their own methods of working.

For indigo blue, varieties of *Indigofera* were used. In this region indigo dyeing was done only at Eliza's; therefore, independent batik women had to come to her for help. To obtain the blue color, the cloth was immersed in the dye and then exposed to the air, where the color developed gradually by oxidation. This process too had to be repeated several times until the desired intensity of color was attained.

This gradual emergence of blue in the cloth after it was removed from the dye vat was surrounded by an aura of mysticism, as it still is. Once every five weeks on the Monday three days before *Kemis-Wage*, the principal payday, a *selamatan* (ceremonial repast) was given for the indigo dye. The celebration took place in front of the indigo room and was traditionally attended by men only. The only person allowed to enter this room was the *tukang celep* responsible for the indigo, who always kept the key to the padlock with him. A priest from the *kampung* conducted the ceremony

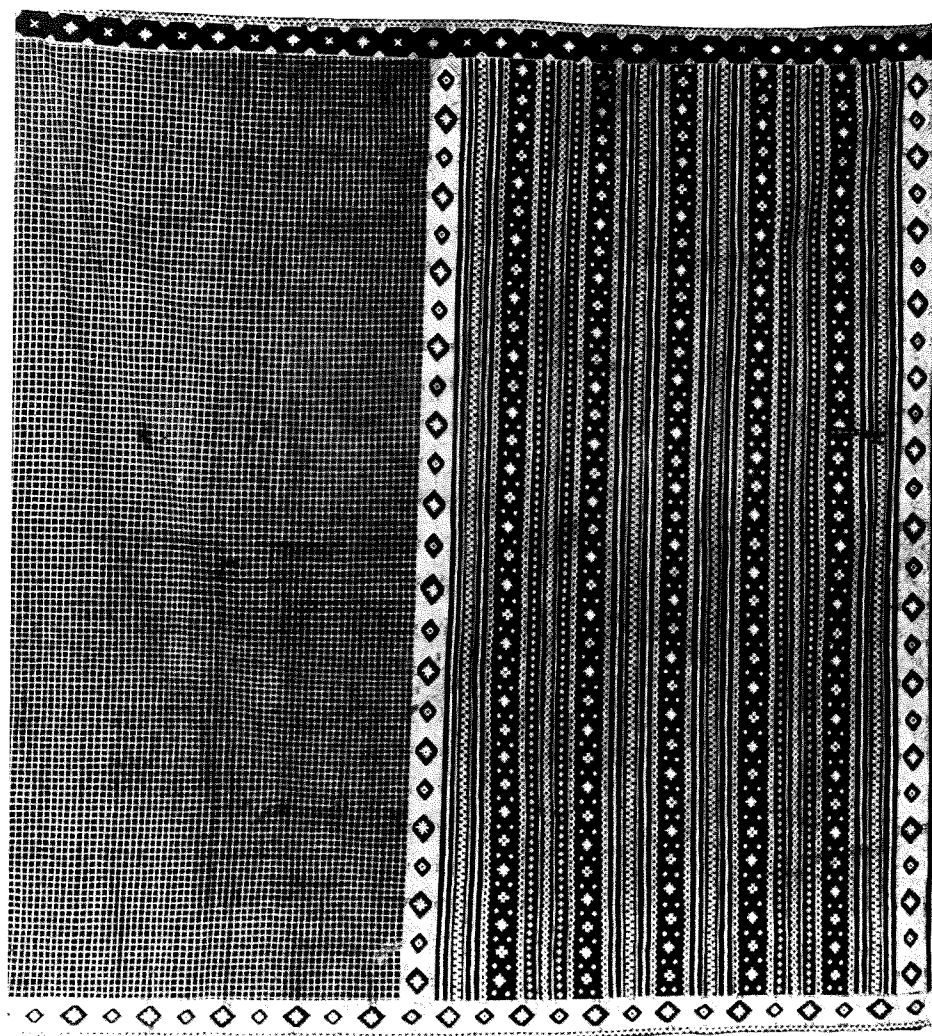
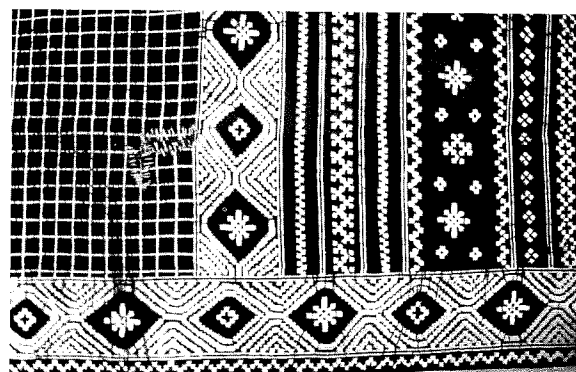


Fig. 17 a The *badan* imitates a *lurik*, a woven checked pattern, while the *kepala* is executed in *nitik*, a batik sim-

ulation of a woven design. Reddish-brown and white, no signature. Private collection.



b Detail.

Fig. 17-19 Three sarong, ca. 1900. Batik imitations of woven patterns and other textile techniques.

and burned the incense. From a folded banana leaf, black *ketan* (sticky rice) with grated coconut and Javanese syrup was consumed. Small banana-leaf boats were suspended from the inner edge of the indigo vats so that they floated on the surface. These were filled with



Fig. 18 The blue and white *kepala* (left) imitates *ikat*-worked designs; the reddish-brown and white *badan* (right) simulates *lurik*. Signature. Private collection.

finely cut-up *pandan* leaves (*Pandanus amaryllifolium* Roxb.), *melati* flowers (*Jasminum sambac* Ait.), Persian rose petals, and small pieces of incense, producing the characteristic hallowed perfumes.

Although Eliza was too sober-minded to be

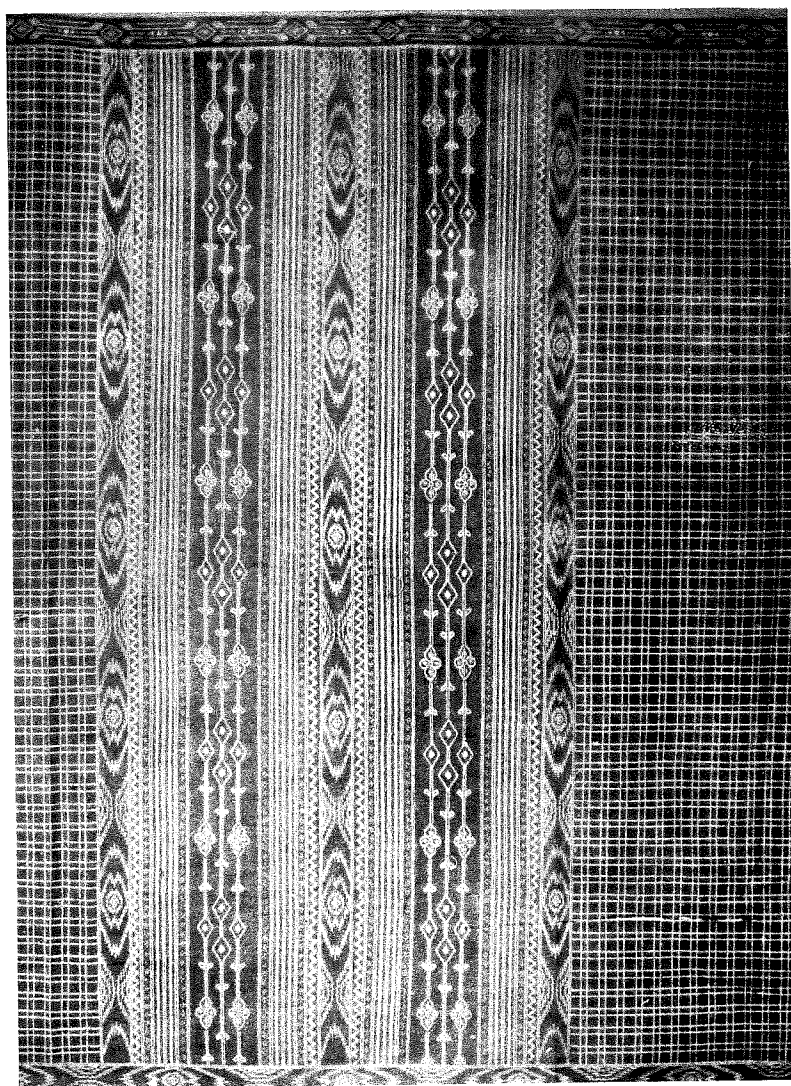
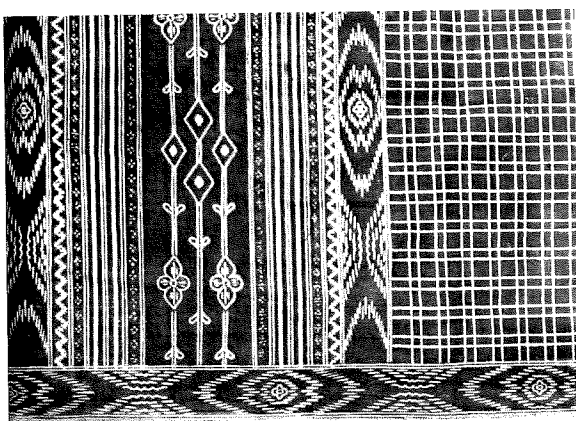


Fig. 19 a Sarong in reddish-brown and white worn by Eliza van Zuylen. The *kepala* imitates *ikat*; the *badan*, *lurik*. Signature. Private collection.



b Detail.

superstitious, she was nevertheless compelled to behave according to tradition. If not, a "faithful" one might refuse to work with the unconsecrated indigo, or a worker could feel urged to prove the necessity for such consecration by interference. The entire contents

of a carefully prepared vat could be spoiled by a little crude salt.

For a green color, yellow *tegerang* liquid was applied to the indigo-colored cloth.

For violet and purple synthetic dye was used, made from a kind of ink available in one-liter bottles at Van Dorp's bookshop in Semarang. The ink was treated with certain chemicals to render it colorfast.

To dye a small area a color other than those available in the dyebaths, the surrounding area was waxed and the appropriate dyes applied. The cloth was spread on a piece of *gribig*, a mat made from the porous, absorbent inner part of bamboo. A pulpy sediment from the dye was kneaded or patted into the surface with the fingers or a cotton rag until the desired intensity of color was reached. Sometimes the pulp was allowed to remain on the cloth, the edge being lifted now and then to check the intensity. This work was done by a

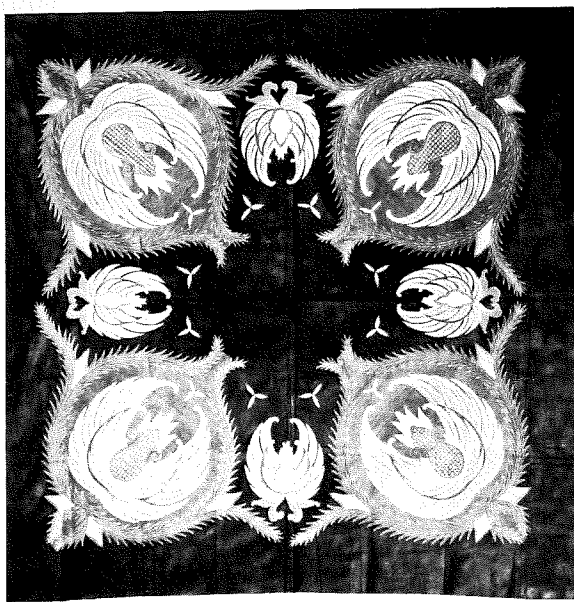


Fig. 20 Tablecloth, ca. 1900, 1 m. square. The well known double *lar* design is incorporated into a composition for a European tablecloth, with touches of Jugendstil. The pattern that encircles the double wing resembles *lar-hidup* (living wing). The coloring of different hues of yellow on a chocolate brown background is called *babar mas* (babar—finished; mas—gold). No signature. Collection of Mrs. G. Allaart-van Zuylen, Utrecht.

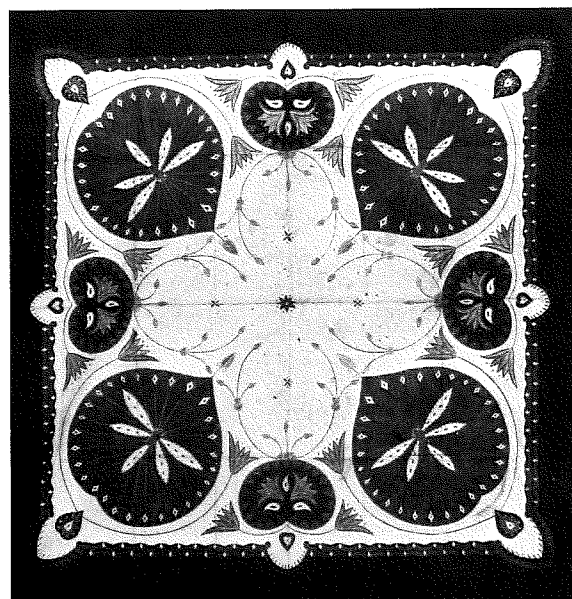


Fig. 21 Tablecloth, ca. 1900, 1 m. square. The composition is derived from the *hawung* design of four pointed ellipses, each touching three others in endless repetition. The ellipses suggest the fruit of the *aren* palm (*Arenga primata* Merz. or *Arenga saccharifera* Labill.). The design, thoroughly stylized and decorated in Jugendstil, is executed in cream with green; the border is black. No signature. Collection of Mrs. C. de Rijck van der Gracht-Moorman, The Hague.

man named Djan, a confidant of the family, who was also a master at yellow and red dyeing.

Although in Java aniline dyes were used after 1898, mostly by the Chinese, and naphthol dyes became available in 1925, the Van Zuylen compound did not begin to use synthetic dyes until 1935, when Eliza's son George returned to work at the compound. He busied himself with studying synthetic dyes thoroughly and with buying materials. Indigosols, reactive dyes, and Indanthrene dyes from I.G. Farben were also used. These were so much easier to handle than the vegetable dyes that the transition to synthetic dyes was very soon complete.

After all dyeing was finished, the wax was removed by boiling (*godok* or *lorot*), which was done by the dyer Djan. Subsequently each batik was washed with locally produced soap, rinsed, dried in the shade, and finally beaten with a mallet on an anvil, both of jackfruit wood. Once it had been folded into a rather small rectangle, the cloth was ready for sale.

THE LAST YEARS OF THE COMPOUND

In 1935, Eliza's daughter Clementine Soeters came home to assist in the business. She started to have the designs drawn on cotton rather than paper, as the greater durability of cotton saved a considerable amount of time.

George began the practice of numbering and

registering batiks, facilitating the re-ordering of patterns. From 1937 on each cloth had two marks, a signature and a number; occasionally the stamp of the compound is still legible (Fig. 2). His wife, Ida van Zuylen-Bäumer, did the bookkeeping and correspondence. That same year Eliza suffered a minor stroke. Although she eventually recovered and was able to resume her work, after 1940 it did become physically difficult for her to sign her products, so from that year on only numbers appeared on them.

In 1942, when the Japanese forces occupied the Dutch East Indies, Eliza was allowed to continue her business, partly by mediation of the Indonesian officials. However, the four family members remaining had to move to an adjoining house, as their own home was claimed by the *kempetai* (Japanese police). Work was also done for the Japanese, such as making *obis*, the long, broad sashes worn with kimono. The Hokokai, the Japanese organization concerned with acquiring labor and goods for the war effort, was also involved with the batik industry on Java. Kain, many of them the pagisoré type, and some sarong were produced. Cotton was scarce, so to occupy as many people as possible, cloths were densely decorated in this "Djawa Hokokai" style (Fig. 22). This style is still in vogue today, not only for export



Fig. 22 a Sarong, after 1946, in imitation of Van Zuylen. In this style, called *Hokokai*, the lower corner of the *badan* adjoining the *kepala* always shows an intricate pattern, consisting of the same flowers as in the *kepala*, which narrows slightly toward the top and is reminiscent of frost on a window pane. This trait recalls a style used after ca. 1900 in Tasikmalaja, in west Java. This configuration has a pink background, in contrast to blue-green in the rest of the *badan*. The red background of the *kepala* is decorated with evenly spread little flowers, while the *badan*

has a plain surface, another typical Hokokai feature. The large bouquet in the *kepala* consists of small bunches of white flowers, undecorated in the characteristic Van Zuylen style; chrysanthemums, symbolizing the Japanese empire; and lotuses, symbols of Buddhism. It is not known if the Japanese allowed these two symbols to be combined with the Van Zuylen-style white flowers, particularly on the pieces that were exported to Japan. Typical Chinese features are the butterflies and the rather harsh coloring seen after 1940. Veldhuisen collection, Rotterdam.



b Detail of signature: Md. E. van Zuylen, Oey Tjay Kwie.



Fig. 23 Detail of a sarong, after 1946, Van Zuylen style. Signature: M.D.E. van Zuylen, Oey Siok Kiem. Veldhuisen collection, Rotterdam.

but for local use; it is now called Jawa Baroe (New Javanese).

The end of the compound came in the turbulent times after the Japanese lost the war. Early in 1946 the establishment was plundered and destroyed by Indonesian freedom fighters. Everything—batiks in different stages of completion, appliances, drawings—disappeared and was sold, mostly to Chinese.

Eliza and Clementine were jailed in Pekalongan; George, Ida, and a daughter were transported to a concentration camp at Wonopringgo. Eliza was diabetic; she soon fell ill

and, unable to obtain insulin, died in a convent hospital in 1947 at the age of 83. George and his family were released by Indonesians and left for Holland, followed by his sister Elise Alting du Cloux in 1949, and by Clementine in 1950.

When Eliza van Zuylen began her business in 1890, she sold a sarong for the price of 3 to 6 guilders; shortly before the Second World War, the price was 80 to 100 guilders. Even allowing for the difference in the buying power of the guilder, the profits from the compound enabled her to provide three of her four sons and her youngest daughter with higher education in the Netherlands, which at that time was a great privilege.

After the war most European batik estab-

lishments came under Chinese management. For some time they maintained the style of the former owners, Eliza van Zuylen among them (Fig. 22). Items signed "M.D.E.," or "Md. E., van Zuylen," followed by the name of the Chinese manager, date from those years (Figs. 22b, 23). Probably derived from the English "made," these letters imply "in the style of." They are followed by an imitation, generally good, of Eliza's signature. The Van Zuylen business was never actually sold to any of these Chinese managers, as Eliza's son and heir, Wilhelm Alphons, rejected an offer of 60,000 guilders to use her signature. One guilder was then worth what ten are today,²² which gives some idea of the fame and prestige achieved by the Van Zuylen compound.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Eliza van Zuylen is survived by two daughters, Elise Alting du Cloux (b. 1893) and Mrs. Lewis (b. 1902), who provided much of the data for this article. More information was obtained from Mrs. G.Y. Alting du Cloux, Elise's daughter, and from G.W. Soeters (1917-1977), son of Eliza's daughter Clementine. The recent research on north coast batiks carried out in the Netherlands and Indonesia by H.C. Veldhuisen was also valuable, particularly in describing the batiks pictured. Unless otherwise noted, photographs are by the author or her husband, Dr. O.L.E. de Raadt.

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NOTES

1. G.P. Rouffaer, *Over Indische Batikkunst*. *Bulletin van het Koloniaal Museum te Haarlem*, Amsterdam, 1900, p. 10.

2. The term Indische has no English equivalent. Its usage is comparable to the term Boer for Dutch South Africans. It refers to people of European or Eurasian parentage who were born and/or lived for a long time in Indonesia. Their heritage is most commonly Dutch-Indonesian, but it may also be Chinese or Arab combined with any European nationality. The resulting adaptation to living in the tropics is shown in their attire, housing, food, and often mores.

3. H.C. Veldhuisen, personal communication, 1979. A signed Van Zuylen batik, ca. 1900, was given to the

Textile Museum by R.T. Hardjonagoro in 1979 (T.M. 1979.6.9). See M. Gittinger, "Conversations with a Batik Master," *Textile Museum Journal*, vol. 18, 1979, cover and p. 31, Fig. 7.

4. Ir R.M.P. Soerachman, *Het Batikbedrijf in de Vorstenlanden*, Landsdrukkerij Weltevreden, 1927.

5. Rita Bolland and Bea Brommer, *Een Kabaya en Sluitspelden*, Stichting cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Overzee, verslagen en aanwinsten 1976-1977, Drukkerij Hooiberg Epe, 1978, p. 55.

6. E. Breton de Nijs, *Tempo Doeloe*, Querido's Uitgeversmaatschappij, Amsterdam, 1961, pp. 9-29.

7. Thomas Stamford Raffles, *The History of Java*, vol. I, Black Parbury and Allen, London, 1817. (1830 edition used, p. 188).

8. Rouffaer, *op. cit.*

9. J. E. Jasper and Mas Pirngadie, *De Batikkunst*, vol. III of *De Inlandsche Kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indië*, Mouton and Co., The Hague, 1916.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

11. Rouffaer, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Rens Loedin-Heringa, personal communication, 1979.

14. *Dictionary of the Decorative Arts*, Harper and Row, New York, 1977, p. 39.

15. A. Veldhuisen-Djajasoebata, personal communication, 1979.

16. H.C. Veldhuisen, personal communication, 1979.

17. Rens Loedin-Heringa, personal communication.

18. Jasper and Pirngadie, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-61.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 72, 75; H.C. Veldhuisen, personal communication, 1979.

20. Rouffaer, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

22. \$1.00 U.S. = approximately 2 guilders.